

**CONTEMPORARY  
COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN)  
INSIGHTS FROM THE FRENCH-  
ALGERIAN WAR (1954-1962)**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CONTEMPORARY COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) INSIGHTS FROM THE  
FRENCH-ALGERIAN WAR (1954-1962)**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Following the successful major combat operations that ousted Saddam Hussein and liberated Iraq from his dictatorial regime, the U.S. finds itself embroiled in a very complex, challenging, and inherently dangerous counterinsurgency environment in Iraq. History is replete with illustrative examples of past counterinsurgencies and the study of these campaigns can provide relevant insight and perspective of the complexities and challenges confronting the counterinsurgency force. Through research and analysis, these examples can provide relevant insight into various types of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, as well as the successes and failures experienced in operating in these unconventional environments. The French Algerian War (1954-1962) provides one such illustrative case study. This project researches and examines three main elements from the French Algerian experience: the Algerian insurgency, the French counterinsurgency, and the political dimensions of the conflict. Citing both similarities and differences of the like elements in our current conflict in Iraq, e.g. Iraqi insurgency, U.S. counterinsurgency, and political dimensions, the selected elements for this project are intended to provide relevant insights and provide military leaders and planners a

better understanding, perspective, and critical lens to view counterinsurgency campaigns in order to plan and execute more effectively in future conflicts.

## CONTEMPORARY COUNTERINSURGENCY INSIGHTS FROM THE FRENCH-ALGERIAN WAR (1954-1962)

We give express charge, that in our marches through the country, there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.

—William Shakespeare,  
*Henry V*, Act III Scene 6

Almost five years after the successful initial combat operations that kicked off Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in March 2003, which resulted in the United States liberation of Iraq from the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. finds itself involved in a very complex, challenging, and inherently dangerous counterinsurgency (COIN) environment in Iraq. This counterinsurgency environment is punctuated by unconventional, irregular warfare against an asymmetric threat presenting significant challenges to historically conventional forces. How can conventional forces adapt to this type of warfare and succeed? Our own rich and varied national experience in irregular warfare from 1776 to Iraq shows that we must approach it in a fundamentally different manner from our approach to conventional warfare.<sup>1</sup> History offers valuable insights into these unconventional approaches. Insurgencies and counterinsurgencies are not a new phenomenon and history is replete with illustrative case studies. The ability to draw contemporary insights from past counterinsurgency operations can assist current and future leaders from making similar mistakes and providing a foundation on which to build effective responses. One particular historical example that has drawn a considerable amount of attention in the context of the challenges we are facing in Iraq is the French-Algerian War (1954-1962). This particular French conflict has drawn the

attention of President George W. Bush, as well as both political and military leaders in Washington, as the United States finds itself trying to find solutions while embroiled in a tough counterinsurgency fight. Through proper analysis and well-formulated research, the study of history can provide invaluable insights and lessons learned for current and future military leaders

The purpose of this paper is to explore selected elements of the counterinsurgency experience from the French-Algerian war that are both relevant and in some cases irrelevant to today's U.S. efforts in Iraq. To accomplish this purpose, the paper will examine the following three elements: The Algerian insurgency; the French counterinsurgency; and the political dimensions. Drawing relevant insights and seeing how the French conducted a counterinsurgency confronting the complexities experienced in the war in Algeria with both successes and failures may enable the U.S., both militarily and politically, to understand better and provide clarity to its efforts in Iraq.

### Algerian Insurgency

Understanding and recognizing the motivations and desires, the organization and structure, as well as the strategy and operations of an insurgent force, is a critical first step for the counterinsurgent; i.e., knowing the enemy. In the study and analysis of the French-Algerian war and the current U.S. situation in Iraq, it is beneficial to draw relevant insights and understand the similarities and differences between the Algerian insurgency and the insurgency in Iraq through the elements listed above.

In Algeria, the insurgent goal was to establish an independent state within the framework of the principles of Islam, although most of the population remained ambivalent until the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) initiated a campaign of discrete

urban terrorism.<sup>2</sup> As the preceding section indicates, at the start of the French-Algerian War in 1954, the Muslim population was under French colonial rule for 124 years. The vast majority of the Muslim population was severely repressed in Algeria and Arab nationalism within the region was at its height while European colonialism was in decline. Leading up to 1954, the Algerian insurgency's primary motivation was nationalism expressed through armed resistance, which would later lead to adopting terrorism as a tactic. The FLN, which provided the political direction for the insurgency, and the Armée' de Liberation Nationale (ALN), which provided the armed resistance, reminiscent of Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), provided a structure, unity of effort, and a unified message. The establishment and the ascendancy of the FLN/ALN as the leading movement of Algerian independence came as a result of bitter conflict with other nationalist groups. This conflict within the war, which was revealed years later, was a struggle for power, not over the principle of an independent Algeria.

The basic thrust of the FLN's strategy during the initial stages of the war focused on creating resistance groups and cells whose main task was to recruit new members and impress a pro-independence mindset on the Algerian Muslim community.<sup>3</sup> Following this stage, the ALN stepped up an urban-based terrorism campaign causing a French reaction that resulted in draconian countermeasures that would eventually influence many Algerian Muslim "fence-sitters" to take up the cause of the FLN, as well as garner French domestic and international attention and scrutiny. With a force of less than 300 fighters, the insurgency was launched in the early hours of November 1, 1954. The FLN broadcast a proclamation from Cairo urging all Muslims to join in a national struggle for the "restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social

within the framework of the principles of Islam.”<sup>4</sup> Egypt, Morocco, as well as other North African countries and Europe, provided sanctuary for leaders and supporters of the FLN. This proclamation indicated a clear strategic communication message for the entire international community and specifically the Muslim world. In the Cold War context of the times, this acknowledgement of the Algerian struggle and declaration for independence garnered support from anti-Western countries and organizations which would play a contributable role in the final outcome of the conflict. Without the outside support, the Algerian insurgency may have very well failed to achieve its ends of an independent state.

At first glance, the insurgency facing the United States in Iraq is vastly different than the insurgency facing the French in Algeria in 1954. Today, coalition forces in Iraq are facing, at a minimum, four types of insurgents with little to no affiliation: 1) Former regime elements (FRE), 2) Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), as well as independent Islamic fundamentalist groups, 3) Sunni and Shia tribal militias, and 4) criminal elements motivated by self-interest and personal gain. This insurgent mix within Iraq adds to the complexity of the counterinsurgency environment confronting the U.S. and coalition forces. The deep sense of nationalism that fueled the Algerian Muslims in pursuing an independent state against a colonial regime is markedly different from the insurgency in Iraq; each insurgent group above is fueled and motivated differently. There is an overall lack in unity of command and unity of effort. There is no single unified message coming from a single entity. There appears to be no clear leader (or leadership); no attempt to seize and actually hold territory; and no single, defined, or unifying ideology.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate, a U.S. Army unit operating in a predominantly Shia neighborhood in Baghdad

is facing a much different insurgent element than a U.S. Marine operating in Western Al Anbar, a predominant Sunni area. The Algerian insurgency is very different from the various insurgent elements within Iraq with far different strategic goals. The FLN/ALN, as well as the other competing nationalist groups, was vying for Algerian independence from French colonial rule; a unified goal. In Iraq, the insurgent elements continue to be in a power struggle between Shia and Sunni opposition causing violence and instability with each continuing to take the opportunity to conduct attacks on coalition forces creating further instability. This violence and instability provides a fertile ground for foreign jihadists to carry out their cause under Al Qaeda's banner discrediting the United States' efforts and promoting their goal of ridding the infidel from Muslim holy land, a declared Holy War against Western powers. The influence of and the affiliation with Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQIZ) and the headquarters or larger organization of AQ, led by Usama Bin Laden, suspected to be located hidden somewhere in the Northwest frontier of Pakistan, is a loose affiliation at best and its influence is in question. The extent of al-Qaeda in Iraq's ties to the wider al-Qaeda network has long been a subject of debate within the U.S. intelligence community and military.<sup>6</sup> Since 2004, it is believed by the intelligence community that foreign fighters make up a very small percentage of the overall insurgency. According to some U.S. and coalition military sources, approximately 200-400 foreign fighters are thought to be fighting in Iraq.<sup>7</sup> A recent Washington Times article reported that a recent discovery of a cache of records indicated approximately 606 foreign fighters entered Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007.<sup>8</sup> The report goes on to indicate that the foreign fighters originated out of nine different countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The relatively low number of

foreign fighters is not to discount the devastating impact or formidability that a relatively small number can have on coalition/Iraqi efforts, but rather to put the root of the insurgency in perspective. In today's international world order, it is difficult to convince an Iraqi that AQ will provide them with a better future; peace, stability, and prosperity. Elements and factions of AQ need to be severely dealt with in Iraq, but can be marginalized by first mitigating the instability being caused by secular violence, as well as confronting the outside support. Like in Algeria, the outside support that the Iraqi insurgency is receiving can be critical for their success. Within Iraq, depending on the region, province, or even neighborhood, U.S. and coalition forces may be dealing with an enemy or insurgent driven by very different ends, ways, and means.

Five years into the conflict, an intelligence gap continues to hamper U.S. forces in understanding two basic criteria; insurgent identity and numbers of insurgents. Conflicting intelligence estimates have hampered the U.S. forces understanding of the organization and structure of the various insurgent elements. Knowing the enemy is fundamental, whether in a conventional or unconventional environment. In Algeria, the FLN/ALN established a hierarchical organization. French forces were able to systematically break down the organization. This cellular structure of the FLN/ALN was depicted in Gino Pontecarvo's movie, The Battle of Algiers, where the paratrooper commander, working on a blackboard, was systematically filling in the wire diagram of those insurgents identified, captured, or killed. As described in Alistair Horne's book, A Savage War of Peace; "...a complex organigramme began to take shape on a large blackboard, a kind of skeleton pyramid in which, as each fresh piece of information came from the interrogation centres; another name (and not always necessarily the right

name) would be entered".<sup>9</sup> The French were able to eventually dismantle and crush the FLN. The problem in Iraq is that there appears to be no such static wiring diagram or organizational structure to identify, unravel, and systematically dismantle.<sup>10</sup>

Despite some of the apparent differences in motivations and desires, as well as structure and organization between the Algerian and Iraqi insurgencies, what relevant elements can be drawn from the insurgent strategy and operations to provide contemporary insight into U.S. efforts in Iraq today? The FLN/ALN strategy to conduct urban-based terrorism operations achieved the following: 1) The over-reaction of French security forces in response to the attacks, 2) striking fear and terror into the Algerian populace by producing violence and instability discrediting the French government's ability to provide security, and 3) raising French domestic, as well as international, concern over the futility of a war in Algeria. No matter the motivation and desires or the structure and organization of the insurgency, we have witnessed the same strategy in Iraq among the various insurgent elements and the U.S. has repeated some of the errors made by the French. The complexity inherent in irregular warfare and the counterinsurgency environment can lead to more unanticipated second and third order effects for the counterinsurgent force in response to insurgent actions than conventional warfare. Counterinsurgent forces must better understand this environment to be able to develop appropriate actions in response to insurgent attacks. The U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps in their Counterinsurgency Field Manual cite nine paradoxes for fighting in a counterinsurgency environment. One of which is: Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction: Often insurgents carry out a terrorist act or guerilla raid with the primary purpose of enticing counterinsurgents to overreact, or at least to

react in a way that insurgents can exploit, e.g. opening fire on a crowded street or executing a clearing operation that creates more enemies than it takes off the streets.<sup>11</sup> This can be termed as classic provocation tactics; provoking the counterinsurgent to respond in a way that will have negative effects to the force's mission. At times, the determination of an appropriate response can sometimes mean no response at all if the outcome of the action will ultimately be counterproductive. Despite early failures on the part of U.S. and coalition forces, avoiding overreaction to enemy actions has improved in Iraq, especially following the internationally highlighted allegations in Haditha of an inordinate number of civilians killed following an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on a Marine infantry squad. U.S. forces need to exhibit a high degree of tactical patience in achieving objectives, rather than overreact and alienate the populace.

The above analysis and focus on the Algerian insurgency provides insight and understanding of one particular insurgent force. The Algerian insurgency did not possess the size, strength, or capability of the French forces and had to resort to asymmetric tactics, primarily urban-based terrorism. The same type of tactics can be attributed to the various insurgent groups in Iraq. Although there are some similarities between the Algerian insurgency and the insurgency in Iraq, it can only be seen as a loose parallel, while still providing relevant insight. As Thomas Hammes states, "Each insurgency rests in the culture, the history, and the situation of that country...you don't look for specific answers but patterns of thoughts and ideas."<sup>12</sup>

## French Counterinsurgency

### Measured Response

In their initial response to the insurgency's urban based terrorism, the French forces played right into the hands of the insurgents whose two objectives were to provoke an overreaction by the security forces and draw international attention to the Algerian struggle for independence and drive a wedge between the local population and the French colonial administration. Due to a fractured political structure within France, the French military possessed considerable autonomy allowing it to order the restoration of the Algerian capitol by all means necessary. Rationalizing that extreme circumstances warranted extreme countermeasures, the unit's commander-in-chief, General Jacques Massau, authorized wholesale round-ups of entire neighborhoods (enacted under a system of quadrillage in which the city was divided into controlled "squares"—each one conforming to a regional command) in addition to extrajudicial preemptive detentions of FLN suspects.<sup>13</sup> The French military actions also included torture to gain information on the FLN organization, which will be discussed later. The tactics, techniques, and procedures developed and carried out by the French forces lacked the foresight of the second and third order effects and consequences as a result of their military actions. The initial French response, although initially effective, would prove to be ultimately counterproductive in a counterinsurgency environment. It caused a great deal of consternation and alienated the Muslim community in both Algeria and the French homeland.

The reports coming out of Algeria of the treatment of the indigenous population caused a great deal of outrage and disdain, both domestically and internationally. By

1957, the Algerian War started to become internationalized as a result of purported atrocities against the Algerian Muslims by the French Army. These alleged atrocities fueled anti-war protests and contributed to additional outside support for the FLN. Despite setbacks in the United Nations in the early part of the war, the FLN by 1957 began to chalk up international victories to include the shifting of American policy. Speaking from the senate floor, Senator John F. Kennedy renounced U.S. policy toward Algeria as “a retreat from the principles of independence and anti-colonialism;” and, elsewhere, that it “furnished powerful ammunition to anti-Western propagandists through Asia and the Middle East.”<sup>14</sup> At the end of February, 1957, an Arab “summit” composed of Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt convened in Cairo and, in a first display of Middle East unity, declared its total support for the Algerian cause.<sup>15</sup> In the Cold War climate and with the influence of the U.S.S.R. and Red China in the United Nations security council, the Algerian struggle for independence gained momentum from this outside support which would significantly contribute to France changing course on continuing the war in Algeria and subsequently grant Algeria her independence.

#### Center of Gravity: The Population

Counterinsurgency forces must understand the criticality of the center of gravity in a counterinsurgency environment: the populace. This is an elementary fact in the study of counterinsurgencies but is often lost in execution. The French had a far greater history in Algeria and quelled previous insurgencies over the time of their colonial rule. Throughout, the French failed to fully understand the importance of focusing their efforts on the dominant Muslim community and lift some of the repressive laws and rules governing Algeria. Rather than recognize and mitigate the animosity of the indigenous

population, the French deliberately took steps to politically and economically marginalize the Muslim inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> During the Battle of Algeria, the French over reaction to insurgent attacks, often indiscriminate attacks, would prove to be a fatal error. Not only had indigenous Muslims been irreconcilably estranged, the metropolitan population had become totally disillusioned with the idea of an *Algerie Francaise* and international opinion was squarely behind decolonization.<sup>17</sup> How did it come to this? One can argue the French were applying conventional responses to an irregular, counterinsurgency environment and focusing solely on the enemy, at least in the early part of the war which would in turn have a lasting effect determining the eventual outcome.

The U.S. had similar experiences in 2003 and 2004. Early military responses in Iraq also alienated the civilian population. Large sweeps, night raids, escalation of force (EOF) incidents killing or injuring innocent civilians, and indiscriminate acts of disrespect angered many Iraqis during the ensuing months after ground combat operations. The U.S. and coalition forces were creating more enemies than taking off the street and failing to establish an adequate level of security for the civilian populace or gain their respect. This was illustrated in the following quote from an Iraqi insurgent as reported by a United Press International reporter, "They promised to liberate us from occupation. The Americans promised us rights and liberty...and my colleagues and I waited to make our decision on whether to fight until we saw how they would act. They should have come and just given us food and some security...It was then that I realized that they had come as occupiers and not as liberators and my colleagues and I then voted to fight."<sup>18</sup> It is a truism of counterinsurgency that a population will give its allegiance to the

side that will best protect it.<sup>19</sup> The U.S. military has initiated an approach to counter the sentiment expressed by the Iraqi above through training and education. Predeployment training and the establishment of the Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence located at Camp Taji began to address the issue of angry, disenfranchised Iraqi citizens opposed to the coalition because of perceived or real mistreatment. The center offered a course which was required for inbound Commanders and Staff from the company level and above. U.S. and coalition forces have been correcting this problem in stride and have been achieving some levels of success as witnessed by the “Anbar Awakening,” the establishment of anti-insurgent organizations among Sunni leaders who are rallying their tribes and working in better coordination with coalition forces. In an early 2007 Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee Annual Threat Assessment, Lieutenant General Michael D. Maples, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, provided the following testimony, “...it is true that we have made progress in Al Anbar. We see levels of violence that are going down. Most importantly, we see cooperation out of the Sunni tribal leaders – the sheiks – who have taken an opposite stance to Al Qaeda in Al Anbar, largely for tribal reasons but also for our benefit in doing that. They have encouraged young men to join the Iraqi police forces – the national police – and to come on board as part of the security elements there.” Had U.S. and coalition forces understood this aspect when confronting the insurgency, odds are that we would not be playing catch-up at this point. Adapting in this way which they may continue to exploit is paying coalition forces big dividends.

## Failure to Recognize an Insurgency

A relevant insight that can explain some of the early missteps of both the French in Algeria and the U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq is both governments' failure to recognize the budding insurgency. For the French, there were indications and warnings throughout various periods over their 100 years of colonial rule of growing unrest of the Muslim community in Algeria. By the time the insurrection was finally recognized for what it was, only drastic political and military action would have reversed the tide, and slowly in any case.<sup>20</sup> Had the French made more realistic attempts to grant additional autonomy and allow the Muslim community to play a bigger part in the governance of Algeria, it may have avoided conflict. Despite evident unrest in Algeria immediately following the end of WWII in 1945, a general state of apathy ruled the political climate within the French government in regards to Algeria. In 1945, there had been a mounting series of minor incidents against colons, as the European settlers in Algeria were called; cars and even children leaving school had been stoned; fatmas, or domestic servants, told their employers that they had been warned to no longer work for them.<sup>21</sup> On walls graffiti appeared overnight exhorting: "Muslims awaken!" "It's the Muslim flag that will float over North Africa!" Or, with more direct menace: "Francais, you will be massacred by the Muslims!"<sup>22</sup> While Europe was celebrating V-E Day on May 8, 1945, a small town in Algeria called Setif', inhabited predominantly by Muslims, organized a mass march that was crushed by the French with over 6000 Muslims reported and 300 Europeans killed in the massacre. The incident was played down in metropolitan France and received little international attention. France failed to adequately recognize and act on the indications and warnings of a much larger insurrection that would play out nine years later.

For the U.S. in Iraq, it was the failure to adequately plan for Phase IV. At the heart of this criticism is the apparent neglect in the planning for post-invasion stability operations following the initial military assault on Iraq, the defeat of its military, and the destruction of Saddam Hussein and his dictatorial Ba'athist regime.<sup>23</sup> Marine Col. Nicholas Reynolds, an official Corps historian, agreed that he found nothing worthy of being considered a plan: "Nowhere in Centcom (Central Command) or CFLCC (Combined Forces Land Component Commander) had there been a plan for Phase IV that was like the plan for Phase III, let alone all the preparations that accompanied it, including the cross talk during its development, the many rehearsals of concept drills, and the exchange of liaison officers."<sup>24</sup> This lack of planning was based on a list of faulty assumptions to include the following that there would be an adequate number of former Iraqi military and police who have switched sides and be able to support U.S. and coalition forces, that international support would be available and willing to assist, and that an Iraqi government would be quickly installed under a UN mandate. Instead, the U.S. found itself going it alone and without a plan to contend with a situation that gave the insurgent elements valuable time to organize, recruit, and begin to conduct attacks against the U.S. and coalition forces and discrediting all efforts to stand up an interim government. There is no going back to correct this egregious error, but it can serve as a lesson for future potential insurgent environments. The fact that military planners apparently didn't consider the possibility that sustained and organized resistance could gather momentum and transform itself into an insurgency reflects a pathology that has long afflicted governments and militaries everywhere: the failure not only to recognize the incipient conditions for insurgency, but also to ignore its nascent manifestations and

arrest its growth before it is able to gain initial traction and in turn momentum.<sup>25</sup> This was a central point in a RAND study of the British experience with insurgencies in the 1950's: "Late recognition of an insurgency," the report stated, "is costly, insofar as the insurgents have the opportunity to gain a foothold before facing any organized opposition."<sup>26</sup> For strategic leaders and planners not to have planned for the worst case or wild card scenarios is negligent and is directly responsible for the deteriorating developments that followed the initial ground operations.

#### Lack of Counterinsurgency Doctrine

Another insight that is relevant between the two conflicts is the lack of counterinsurgency doctrine. David Galula is quoted in his book, Pacification in Algeria: 1954-1962, "In my zone, as everywhere in Algeria, the order was to "pacify". But exactly how? The sad truth was that, in spite of all our past experience, we had no single, official doctrine for counterinsurgency warfare."<sup>27</sup> To counter this lack of doctrine, the French established the Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerilla Warfare (CIPCG) to train and indoctrinate officers and noncommissioned officers in psychological warfare and counterinsurgency operations in Algeria. Although the school eventually failed in its originally intended purposes towards the end of the war due to the protests and acrimonious climate in France towards the war, its initial intention was to train the military to operate in the challenging and complex counterinsurgency environment focusing on the unconventional aspects and psychological warfare. French military veterans, like David Galula and Roger Trinquier, would eventually write and publish respected counterinsurgency doctrine based off their experiences in both Vietnam and Algeria; doctrine that in 2001 was not currently being studied, trained to, or

understood by U.S. forces leading up to the current conflicts. Despite the U.S.' security and military strategy focus on defeating communist-backed insurgencies in the late twentieth century in places like Vietnam and El Salvador, the established doctrine found little interest after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Policymakers, military leaders, and defense experts assumed that insurgency was a relic of the Cold War, posing little challenge in the "new world order."<sup>28</sup> Following the events of 9/11 and subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Department of Defense and the military services, especially the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, were forced to develop contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine to confront the impending challenges. Like the mythical phoenix, counterinsurgency had emerged from the ashes of its earlier death to become not just a concern of the U.S. military but the central focus.<sup>29</sup>

To illustrate, the U.S. with its failure to plan for Phase IV were applying conventional solutions to a growing insurgent problem during the initial stability and support stage following major combat operations due to the lack of current counterinsurgency doctrine and the understanding of the counterinsurgency environment. Despite comprehensive military doctrine for fighting insurgencies from past experiences, the services' training and education commands were out of date for confronting the 21<sup>st</sup> century counterinsurgency environment. In reference to the early stages of the Iraq insurgency, former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Jack Keane was quoted on the *Jim Lehrer News Hour*, as saying, "We put an Army on the battlefield that I had been part of for 37 years. It doesn't have any doctrine, nor was it educated and trained, to deal with an insurgency...After the Vietnam War, we purged

ourselves of everything that had to do with irregular warfare or insurgency, because it had to do with how we lost that war. In hindsight, that was a bad decision.”<sup>30</sup> Like the French in establishing the Center for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerilla Warfare (CIPCG), U.S. military leaders led the charge in establishment of the Counterinsurgency Center of Excellence, as well as the publication of a comprehensive Counterinsurgency Field Manual. The U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5) was established to make both services more effective learning organizations that are better able to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of modern counterinsurgency campaigns.<sup>31</sup> This effort was designed as much for fighting future counterinsurgencies as it is for improving our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan; to inculcate in the military professional the unconventional nature and complexity of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare. For the French, it was “too little, too late” in their adaptation of practices in Algeria to effect the eventual outcome of the war; the damage was already done. For U.S. forces, the outcome of Iraq is still to be determined, but the introduction and publication of this doctrine is heading in the right direction. Additionally, the Department of Defense initiative to stand up a joint Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) to conduct security cooperation, military to military training, and building partner capability with other countries is a proactive first step in preventing budding insurgencies.

## Intelligence

The challenge that security forces and militaries the world over have faced in countering terrorism is how to obtain information about an enigmatic enemy who fights unconventionally and operates in a highly amenable environment where he is typically

indistinguishable from the civilian populace.<sup>32</sup> The French became quite adept at gathering information and intelligence from human intelligence (HUMINT) sources on the insurgency in Algeria. To quickly and effectively restore control in Algeria, the French military applied methods of interrogation that would soon come under a tremendous amount of scrutiny, both domestically and on the world stage. These methods alienated the Muslim community within Algeria driving many to support the FLN, whether actively or passively. The question of torture and harsh interrogation tactics plagued the French military efforts in Algeria and on the home front. The short-term necessity of obtaining the necessary information failed to provide long term advantages for success in Algeria. Ultimately, it proved to be strategically counterproductive and put into question France's moral legitimacy. The autonomy granted to the military by the French government to quell the problems in Algeria allowed the military leadership to create a climate in which any type of means can be justified to achieve the ends. The French proved effective and the military could attribute much of its intelligence gathering success on their ability to extract information from detainees which ultimately led to the dismantling of the FLN; a military success by all measures, but at what cost? As the stories of brutal acts and torture became revealed, the vehement public outcry and disgust would contribute to turning the tide of both French support and the international community.

The United States is facing a similar challenge, both in Iraq and the overall global war on terror. At ground level, an effective and reliable human intelligence (HUMINT) network can be an extremely reliable and efficient source of information complementing other forms of intelligence-gathering methods and techniques operating in a

counterinsurgency environment. But how you establish that HUMINT network can be the difference between success and failure. Torture and harsh interrogation techniques have historically proven to be counterproductive, as illustrated in the French experience. Following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan, the Justice Department, in 2002, gave the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) legal approval for water-boarding, an interrogation technique that simulates drowning the suspect, as well as other tough interrogation methods. Almost six years later, the United States House of Representatives have approved an intelligence bill that would forbid the CIA from using the aforementioned interrogation techniques. The U.S. military forbid the same interrogation methods in 2006, along with various acts of abuse resulting from the Abu Ghraib incident. As a Nation, in order to retain moral legitimacy, this legislation is headed in the right direction. In 2007, our military is not granted the same level of autonomy as the French military during the Algerian war and we are subject to far more oversight and scrutiny. More importantly, the backlash of allegations and substantiated cases can cause an irreversible impact on success. The 2007 U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual specifically cites the French military's permission to conduct torture against suspected insurgents and its ultimate negative effect: Lose Moral Legitimacy, Lose the War.<sup>33</sup>

Although it may take time and a considerable amount of tactical patience, building an effective and reliable HUMINT network can only be done by building trust, confidence, and empowering the indigenous population with security and opportunity. A comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy should offer alternative sources of identity and empowerment for the bored, disillusioned, and disempowered.<sup>34</sup> By doing this, it will

enable forces to build a HUMINT network when used in conjunction with other forms of intelligence gathering will increase the overall effectiveness in defeating an insurgency. Torture and abuse to gather information is not only ineffective; it is immoral, illegal, and unprofessional.

### Political Dimensions of Counterinsurgency

#### Civil-Military Unity of Effort

General Rene Emilio Ponce, the defense minister at the height of the insurgency in El Salvador during the 1980's, was often quoted as stating that "90 percent" of countering insurgency "is political, social, economic and ideological and only 10 percent military."<sup>35</sup> States involved in countering insurgencies need to leverage all elements of national power: Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement. The political and military dimensions must be fully coordinated in order to achieve unity of effort. Leading up to the beginning of the French-Algerian War in 1954, France possessed no clear-cut policy on Algeria and when confronted with the violence and instability being caused by the FLN/ALN granted the military unprecedented autonomy to regain order. Although forceful military actions can work to seriously degrade the operational capabilities of an insurgent movement, this alone will be insufficient to secure a complete victory in the absence of a favorable political context.<sup>36</sup> This proved to be the fatal error for France. Despite some French successes in the pacification of Algeria, their efforts did very little to neutralize the initial brutal campaign to regain order. The FLN seized on the opportunity to expose the brutality and raise questions of the legitimacy of French efforts to the international community. It is a widely accepted truism that France won the military battle in Algeria but lost the

political war.<sup>37</sup> Coming out of WWII and defeat in Indochina, the French government and the people were apathetic to the cause of Algeria. The revelations of torture and brutality by the Army could not be politically overcome. Anti-colonialism, international influence, and outside support galvanized interest in the struggle and support for Algeria's independence. By December of 1960, the United Nations General Assembly voted on a motion to recognize the right of the Algerian people to self-determination and independence by a vote of 63 to 8, with 20 abstentions.

The lesson from the French is increasingly relevant today and the U.S. is postured to correct a lot of early mistakes of applying a strictly military solution to the insurgency in Iraq. The U.S. is taking self-correcting steps of adapting a better civil-military solution to the problems in Iraq. Recent successes in Iraq have been the result of political, social, and economic programs, not purely kinetic responses to insurgent actions. U.S. efforts in Iraq, under the current leadership of General Petraeus and Ambassador Crockett, have been instrumental in conveying the message of unity of effort. A variety of professional backgrounds are required to achieve success in the challenging and complex environment of counterinsurgencies; military personnel, diplomats, police, politicians, humanitarian aid workers, contractors, and local leaders.<sup>38</sup> A nation will not succeed in a counterinsurgency campaign with a unilateral military effort as the French experienced. For the U.S, there is much more work to be done, but the issues of better civil military and interagency cooperation and coordination are on the table and the opportunity for success is on the horizon. Actions will be required to speak louder than words, adequate funding of the interagency organizations will be the first step to fully integrating their critical capabilities.

As the French grew weary of the war in Algeria, so does the American public with the conflict in Iraq. Although we have seen a recent decrease in violence in Iraq, the human toll in casualties is closing in on 4000 with many more suffering serious injuries. Bi-partisan debates and opinions of continued efforts in Iraq are currently dominating the U.S. political landscape. Political instability in France and the public's outcry and call to end the war in Algeria contributed to the eventual outcome resulting in Algerian independence in 1962. As the U.S. enters an election year, she will find herself at a crossroads between staying the course in Iraq and withdrawing U.S. forces.

### Conclusion

In drawing relevant counterinsurgency insights from the French Algerian War and applying it to today with our efforts in Iraq, one can see there are as many similarities as there are differences. No single doctrine or approach will provide the counterinsurgent with the cookie-cutter solution to defeat an insurgent movement. There are no fixed, standard operational procedures or techniques that can be used in each and every counterinsurgency environment. Likewise, no two insurgencies are alike. Throughout history, insurgencies and counterinsurgencies were driven by various political, economic, social, and cultural factors. The above presented elements of the French Algerian War are intended to provide insight in order to draw parallels that possess a level of relevancy for developing well informed solutions to contemporary counterinsurgencies challenges. The challenge for future military and political leaders is to understand these parallels and to learn the right lessons for applying effective solutions. Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be dominated by persistent conflict and irregular wars. To study insurgency/counterinsurgency experiences from the past can

provide a critical lens to view future conflicts, but at the same time not to apply the wrong lessons. We cannot assume that 21st century insurgency is so like its 20th century predecessor and that old solutions can simply be dusted off and applied.<sup>39</sup> The French Algerian War (1954-1962) provided just one for future strategic leaders to study, analyze, and understand in order to be more effective in counterinsurgency environments in the future.

### Endnotes

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", Occasional Paper, RAND, National Security Research Division (June 2004): 16.

<sup>6</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Papers Paint New Portrait of Iraq's Foreign Insurgents," The Washington Post, 21 January 2008, sec A1, p. 1,12.

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<sup>8</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Papers Paint New Portrait of Iraq's Foreign Insurgents," The Washington Post, 21 January 2008, sec A1, p. 1,12.

<sup>9</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977): 194.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", Occasional Paper, RAND, National Security Research Division (June 2004): 18.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency Field Manual, U.S. Army Field Manual No 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5 (United States; University of Chicago Press, 2007): 49.

<sup>12</sup> Jill Carroll, "How to fight insurgents? Lessons from the French," 29 June 2007; available from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0629/p01s02-wome.htm>; Internet; accessed 01 November 2007.

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<sup>14</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977): 247.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Lou DiMarco, "Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and Guerre Revolutionnaire in the Algerian War," *Parameters* (Summer 2006): 64.

<sup>17</sup> Angel Rabasa, Lesley Anne Warner, Peter Chalk, Ivan Khilko, Paraag, Shukla, "Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations", RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 4, National Defense Research Institute (2007): 24.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>20</sup> David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria: 1954-1962*, (California: The RAND Corporation, 2006):v.

<sup>21</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977): 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", Occasional Paper, RAND, National Security Research Division (June 2004): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco*, (London: The Penguin Press, 2006); 110.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", Occasional Paper, RAND, National Security Research Division (June 2004): 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria: 1954-1962*, (California: The RAND Corporation, 2006):v.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Metz, "New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurgency", *Parameters* (Winter 2007-2008): 20.

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency Field Manual, U.S. Army Field Manual No 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5 (United States; University of Chicago Press, 2007): xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "A Nasty Business," The Atlantic.com, January 2002, (journal on-line); available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200201/hoffman>; Internet accessed 01 November 2007.

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<sup>34</sup> Steven Metz, "New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurgency", Parameters (Winter 2007-2008): 28-29.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", Occasional Paper, RAND, National Security Research Division (June 2004): 5.

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Metz, "New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurgency", Parameters (Winter 2007-2008): 31.

